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Creating relationships through concrete service

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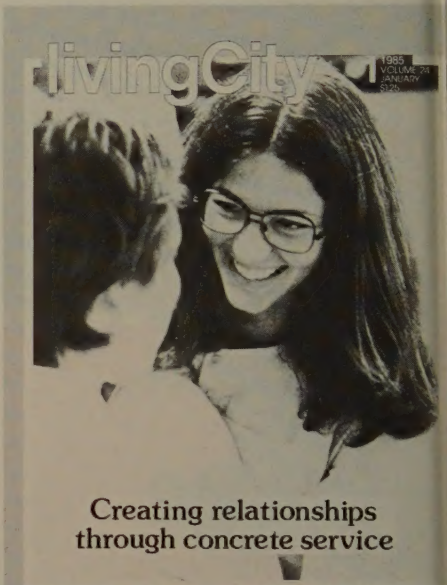

Creating relationships through concrete service

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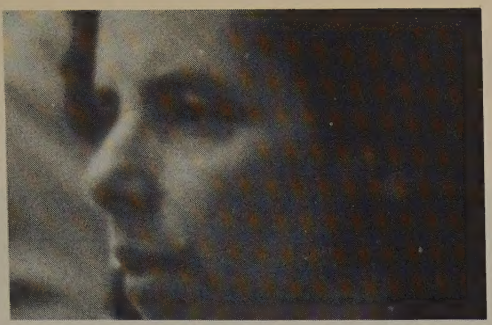
CREATING RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH CONCRETE SERVICE: Participants of a congress on Economy and Work share their efforts of living the Gospel message in everyday work situations.



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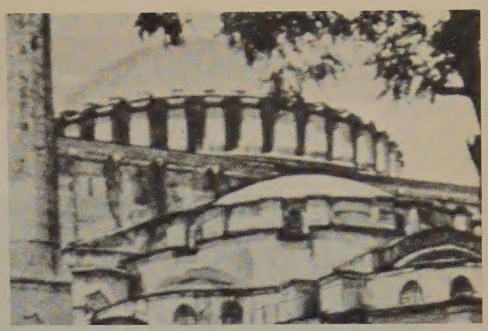

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The fullness of unity

We are continuing our series of articles prepared by Chiara Lubich, founder of the Focolare Movement, on its spirituality of unity.

"The spirituality of unity is made up of a number of fundamental points. Could you describe for us the connection between these different points?"

The spirituality of unity, as with all the spiritualities in the Church, is a way of living Christianity. It rests on certain essential points which are connected to one another: God-Love, the will of God, mutual love, Jesus in the midst, unity, Jesus Forsaken, the word of life, the Eucharist, Mary, the Church.

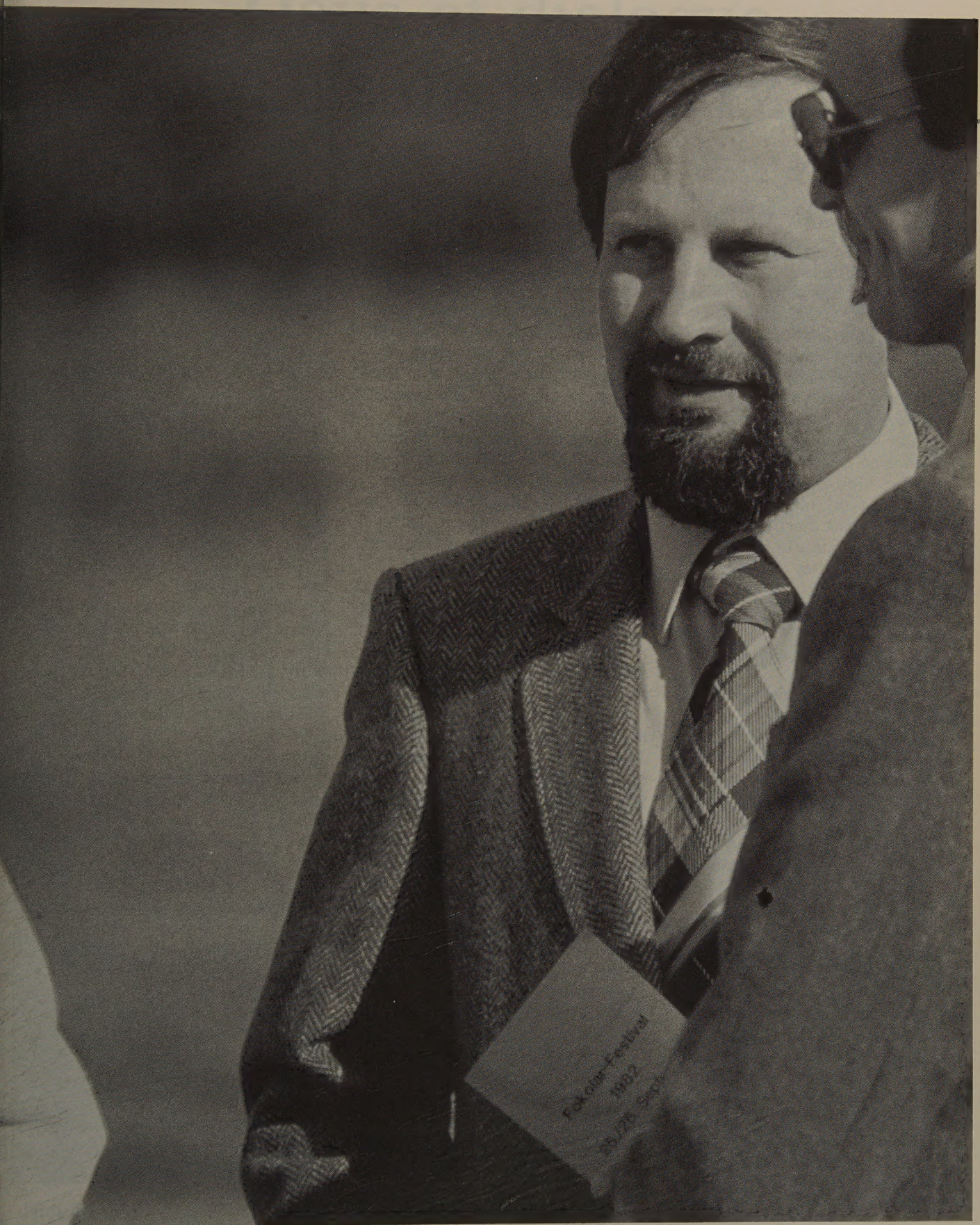
A renewed faith in Love, in God-Love, was the powerful characteristic of the life of the first focolarine, at the beginning of the Movement. In fact, if God were to call us to himself during the war, we wanted this phrase to be written on our tombstone: "We have seen and believed in Love..." (1 Jn. 4:16). A "new faith" in God-Love invaded our hearts; we had not known him in this way before, even if we had been Christians, practicing Catholics.

In the midst of the war God seemed to be using certain circumstances to pierce our souls with light and love, and to reveal to us in a new way his true nature: Love. He loved us with an immense love, a love that only God could have.

The life of faith that we had lived before seemed, in comparison, overshadowed by loneliness. Now it was as if we had gone from being orphans to finding a father. Heaven had drawn closer to earth, and the earth seemed linked to heaven.

The Father loved us and everything that happened unfolded before his loving gaze. He was always present with his love. Everything that happened was willed or permitted by him. It was our profound conviction that even the hairs on our head were counted (cf. Mt. 10:30).

We felt the paternity of God, his love for us, very deeply; but it was not a matter of simply contemplating his love. If he were our Father, this meant that we were his children; if he loved us then we should love him in return. The Spirit led us to search through the scriptures for the best possible way to love



God, to respond to his love with our love.

The Gospel seemed to be offering us the answer with these words: "It is not those who say to me, 'Lord, Lord,' who will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the person who does the will of my Father in heaven" (Mt. 7:21).

To love God meant to do his will; and we saw this as a consequence of a new understanding that God is love. What is the will of God *par excellence*? We felt we had discovered it in the "new commandment": "Love one another as I have loved you" (Jn. 15:12).

Looking back on it now we can understand how important it was to have made *this* choice.

The New Commandment in fact is the synthesis of Christianity and therefore the specific will of God. (We know in fact that *every* road, every spiritual way, every spirituality, is a good way to reach God and is authentically Christian if its arrival point is mutual love; that is, if it serves to build the Church, if it helps Christians to live in a better way the reality of being the Body of Christ. Since God revealed himself to us as Love (he is, in fact, mutual love) the basis of our life could not be anything but mutual love.

Putting the new commandment into practice we felt the fullness of unity, we experienced the presence of Jesus among us: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst" (Mt. 18:20).

Unity, another point of our spirituality, and Jesus in the midst, are linked to the new commandment which is also an expression of the will of God.

The new commandment cannot be effectively put into practice if we do not pay close attention to the word "as": "as I have loved you." The measure of this "as" is expressed by Jesus on the cross, and it contains within it also the apex of his suffering, his cry of abandonment (cf. Mt. 27:46). To live the new commandment, to be love for one another as God is Love, means to keep Jesus Crucified and Forsaken always before us as the model to be imitated.

This point of our spirituality, Jesus Forsaken, is linked to all the others.

Unity, however—as Pope VI affirmed—is the synthesis of Jesus' teachings. It is through knowing and living his words that we can best put love into practice and live unity perfectly.

We think that it is because of this that the Lord urged us right from the beginning of the Movement to consider one sentence of the scriptures at a time and live it intensely. By doing so our life became always more in tune with the Gospel. It was a way to come closer to Jesus' way of living, to become "another Christ" individually in order to become "another Christ" collectively, that is, the Body of Christ.

The nourishment of this Body is the Eucharist, the bond of unity. It brings about the communion between the person and God, and people with one another. Before Jesus prayed to the Father "That all may be one as you Father are in me and I in you" (Jn. 17:21), he instituted the sacrament that would render this possible: the Eucharist.

God-Love, therefore, the will of God, the new commandment, unity, Jesus in the midst, Jesus Forsaken, the word of God and the Eucharist are all realities which are linked to one another, and the person who lived them in the most exemplary way was surely Mary.

She believed in love.

She pronounced her "fiat" to the will of God.

Through the action of the Holy Spirit she generated Christ not only spiritually but also physically, in the heart of the first focolare: the Holy Family.

She treasured the words of God in her heart, meditating upon them and living them.

She proved her love for God and all of humanity with her desolation at the foot of the cross where she lived her abandonment. In fact, out of love for God, in order to do his will, she took into her heart John in the place of Jesus, losing her son first spiritually, and then, at the moment of his death, also physically.

She truly was "another Christ."

She is an outstanding member of the Mystical Body of Christ, model and prototype of the Church.

In the effort of trying to imitate her the members of our Movement fulfill their vocation of being Church.

Chiara Lubich

Days of dialogue days of discovery

compiled by ANNE LINGLEY

Canapress

John Paul II in Ottawa.

> "May the name of God echo in your hearts and may this visit bring to us, both to you and to me, comfort and fresh joy."
>
> Pope John Paul II
> Quebec, Canada

Some events make history. The trip of the Pope to Canada this past September was one of these events. If it is true that he spoke for everyone in the world, it is also true that he addressed his thirty-four speeches and a great number of extemporaneous remarks to the people of this continent.

For this reason Living City will publish for you excerpts from these talks, offering them to you for meditation and study.

We followed the Holy Father along his fast moving and extensive trip throughout Canada. "To have the Pope in my own land is special." "The Pope is really a universal leader and you want to be in his presence." "I've always longed to meet the Pope." It was as if the people we met didn't have to think at all. The answer to our question, "Why have you come here today?" came spontaneously and from the heart. Canadians everywhere knew why they were willing to wait for hours along the streets for a glimpse of him as he passed by, or brave the blustery winds and pelting rain to be present at one of the open-air Masses, or risk the confusion and excitement of the enormous crowds attending the stadium events. "It's a once in a life time opportunity and I wouldn't miss it for the world," was by far the most frequent response.

It was impossible not to be caught up in the tremendous impact this event was having on Canadians and visitors everywhere. We asked one young many on Ottawa, "What has made you so happy about this experience?" He expressed himself in this way: "I'm happy to see all these people living this extraordinary experience together. It gives you the hope that unity of possible. If we lived it for twelve days why not always?"

Even more than a visit, one had the impression that it was an encounter, twelve days of dialogue between the Pope and Canadians, days of mutual discovery. His presence made the country and Canadians "one" with each other and with him as never before; an unforgettable experience of unity.

Within minutes after his arrival, Canada's Governor General, Madame Sauve, welcomed the Pope with these splendid words: "We receive ►

you as a prophet for, more than any other contemporary leader, you have been successful in identifying the causes of our universal anxiety.... This visit will leave in our very soul a permanent mark."

The Pope responded expressing his desire for dialogue with the people of Canada: "For a long time you have waited for me. And I, for my part, have greatly longed to be with you. ... I have some questions to ask you and I would also like to hear yours. I would like to speak to you about the issues of our times ... about the fundamental problems—about the faith, about the experience of God, about hope. My word does not claim to furnish an answer to all your questions or to replace your searching. But it will offer you the light and strength of faith in Jesus Christ.... Brothers and sisters, friends already, let us travel together, let us look at the One who unites us."

And so they set out together on a trip across an immense country, the Pope and Canadians, on an unforgettable voyage of unity.

A different theme had been prepared for each city; in Quebec "Faith and culture," "Mary" in Trois Rivieres, the "Mystery of God" in Montreal, "The Family" in St. John's, the "Community" in Moncton, "Missionary Activity" in Halifax, "Technology and the Human Person" in Toronto, "Faith and Culture in a Multicultural Society" in Winnipeg, "Canada and the Third World" in Edmonton, "The Mystery of God with the Person of Jesus Christ" in Vancouver, and "Peace" in Ottawa-Hull. He spoke powerfully and movingly, words of insight, encouragement and admonition, spoken directly to Canadians but of relevance to Catholics, Christians and men and women of good will everywhere.

"Today in Canada, Catholic is beautiful," was the comment of a minister of the United Church in Ottawa the day of the Pope's departure. "If I were a Catholic I would walk with pride, in fact the Pope's visit has made me proud of being a Christian..."

The Moderator of the United Church of Canada, Rev. Smith had said during the opening of the Ecumenical Service in Toronto: "We Canadians have been called a "winter people." Separated by great distances, as well as by language and by culture, we have difficulty communicating.... We pray that you will warm our winter..." And he did.

Certainly the fruits of this encounter are only just beginning to bud. It will perhaps take a long period of reflection to absorb all that was said. As Madame Sauve expressed it in her speech at the close of the Pope's visit: "All of Canada followed you, heard you and understood your words. Now we must reflect upon them and redirect our activities toward the greater objectives you have delineated."

The Pope's first meeting with the Canadian people took place at the international airport in Quebec. Welcomed by the Governor General, Madame Jeanne Sauve, and by numerous civil and religious authorities, Pope John Paul II extended warm words of greeting.

Greetings to you, people of Canada, in the diversity of your history, of your cultures, of your Provinces, of your Regions.

In this immense country which is Canada, it is in Quebec that I begin my pilgrimage, and this makes me very happy. Greetings to you, Quebec, first Church in North America, first witness to the faith, you who planted the Cross at the intersections of your highways and caused the Gospel to spread over this blessed land!

Greetings to you, the people of Quebec, whose traditions, language and culture give your society such a unique character in North America.

Greetings to you people of this country, Amerindians, people of French and English extraction, immigrants who have come from everywhere and who live together, with each other's help, on the path of history, so arduous and so fascinating.

Greetings to you believers in Jesus Christ and members of the Catholic Church. Let us seek together the firmness of the faith which expresses itself in the perfection of love.

Greetings to you, believers in Jesus Christ and members of other Christian confessions. Let us seek together the same Christ and Lord.

Greetings to you, believers in God and heirs of the people of Israel. Let us seek together the Word of Life.

Greetings to you believers and members of other spiritual families. Let us seek together the face of God.

Greetings to you men and women who are looking for a meaning to your life and do not find a satisfactory answer to your deepest aspirations. You are trying to live your life with dignity and in a responsible an idea of your human energy and of your religious vitality. way. Let us seek together the best way to live.

To all of you, I bring the greetings of the Church of Rome and of the entire Church of God which lives in communion with her spread throughout the world. I bring you the love, joy, sufferings and hope of your brothers and sisters in all parts of the world. In return, I hope I can bring to the world something of yours,

The Pope's first Mass in Canada was celebrated on Sunday, September 9, on the campus of Laval University. Below, excerpts from his homily on the theme "Faith and Culture."

Your ancestors forged a culture here by drawing from the sources in their native land. Over the centuries this heritage has taken root and become diversified; it has been influenced by the Amerindians and has gained much from the presence of the English on this continent. It has been further enriched by succesive waves of immigrants from everywhere. Your people were able to keep their identify while remaining open to other cultures.

The Church has recognized or is about to recognize the holiness of some of these pioneers. They are striking witnesses among so many men and women simple believers going about their daily life, who little by litle fashioned this land in their image, according to their faith.

The energy and zeal of your predecessors also led them to carry the Good News further afield: I acknowledge here a Church which early on sought to spread to the Canadian West, the Great North and many areas of America. What is more she has contributed generously to the missionary effort of the universal Church thoughout the world.

Your motto is *Je me souviens* (I remember). What treasures there are both in the memory of the Church and in the memory of the people!

But in each generation, living memory allows us to recognize the presence of Christ who asks us, as he did in the neighborhood of Caesarea: "And you, who do you say I am?"

The answer to this question is crucial for the future of the Church in Canada and also for the future of your culture.

You are aware that traditional culture, characterized by a certain "Christianity", has been shattered: it is open to a multitude of trends of thought and must find answers to many new questions; science, technology and the arts take on ever on ever more importance; material values are everywhere; but there is also greater sensitivity for the promotion rights, peace, justice, equality, sharing, freedom....

In this changing society, your faith, dear brothers and sisters, must learn to speak out and to be lived. I said it to your bishops last October: "These times are God's times; he will provide his Church with what it requires as long as it remains open, courageous and prayerful." You must remember your past, the boldness and the loyalty of your predecessors, so as to bring the Gospel message in your turn to new situations. You must promote a new culture, integrate the modernity of America without denying its deep humanity coming no doubt from the fact that your culture has been inspired by Christianity. Do not accept the divorce between faith and culture. You are being called today to a new missionary effort.

Culture and education, which is the primary and essential task of culture—is the fundamental search for what is beautiful, true and good. This search best reveals the human being as a subject, bearer of personal transcendence (To UNESCO, June 2, 1980). It helps him to become what he should "be" and not only to take advantage of what he "has" or "possesses". Your culture is not only the reflection of what you are, but the key to what you will be. Accordingly develop your culture in a lively and dynamic way in hope, without fear of difficult questions or new challenges; ►

without for all that allowing yourself to be blinded by the glare of novelty, and without allowing a vacuum, a break to come between the past and the future; in other words, with prudence and discernment, and with the courage of critical freedom in the face of what could be called the "culture industry," and especially with the greatest concern for the truth.

But in addressing myself here to believers, I repeat what I expressed at UNESCO: "I am thinking above all of the fundamental link between the Gospel, that is, the message of Christ and the Church, and man and his very humanity." Yes, dear brothers and sisters, in the culture that you are now developing, which is in line with what you already are by reason of a rich past, in this culture which is always the soul of a nation, faith plays a great part. Faith will illuminate culture, it will give it savor, it will enhance it, as the Gospel says in regard to that "light", "salt" and "leaven" which the disciples of Jesus are called to be. Faith will ask culture what values it promotes, what destiny it offers to life, what place it makes for the poor and the disinherited with whom the Son of Man is identified, how it conceives of sharing, forgiveness and love. If it is this way, the Church will continue to accomplish her mission through you. And you will render service to all society, even to men and women who do not share the same spiritual experience as yourselves. For such a witness respects freedom of conscience, without thus abandoning them to certain "imperatives" of modern civilization which claim to serve human advancement but which in fact detract from respect for life, from the dignity of a love that involves persons, and from the search for the true values of humanity.

But again your faith must remain active and strong; it must become always more personal, more and more rooted in prayer and in the experience of the Sacraments; it must reach the living God, in his Son Jesus Christ the Saviour, through the help of the Holy Spirit, in the Church. This is the faith that you ought to deepen with joy, in order to live it and to bear witness to it in daily life and in the new realms of culture. This is indeed the grace which we must request for the future of Quebec, for the future of all Canada. And here we are back to the fundamental question of Jesus Christ: "And you, who do you say that I am?".

In the faith which Simon Peter professed in the neighborhood of Caesarea Philippi, in the faith which he expressed so beautifully in his first letter, in that same faith I, John Paul II, Bishop of Rome, want to greet you with all my heart at the beginning of my pilgimage in your country.

I want to greet you all, you who are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people set apart for God, you who have been called by God "to sing the praises of God who called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pt. 2:9).

On September 10, the Pope visited the Francois Charon Center for the handicapped. A beautiful and moving encounter took place during which the Pope also addressed the patients and staff.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I have very much wanted to meet personally with you, you who suffer in your bodies from illness or accident. I would like to greet each and every one of you as well as all those who surround you with affection and assistance and who help you to love life and to make it blossom in you like a gift from God.... I want to come near to you and to explore with you the spiritual meaning of your suffering and your hope for a full life....

I would like to say, clearly and forcefully: *the handicapped*

Canapress

A man embraces John Paul II as the Pope enters the mass site in Edmonton, Alberta.

person is a human subject in the full sense, with all the innate, sacred and inviolable rights that that entails. This is true whether the person be handicapped by physical disability, whether due to birth defect, chronic disease or accident, or by mental or sensory deficiency. It is true too, no matter how great the person's affliction might be. We must facilitate his or her participation in all facets of social life and at all possible levels: in the family, at school, at work, in the community, in politics and religion. In practice, this presupposes the absolute respect of the human life of the handicapped person from his or her conception through every stage of development....

You, the handicapped should seek with (Christ) to fight against evil, to overcome the obstacle from which your body suffers, and to do this with the assistance of science and technology and with the courage of love.

This is how we become good samaritans for one another, not only by stopping beside a person suffering the wounds of life, but by bringing him or her efficacious help, by giving ourselves to this person with whom Christ identified himself: "Insofar as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me."

At the heart of all human suffering appears the inevitable question: Why? It is a question about the cause, the reason; it is also a question about the purpose and, finally, meaning. Almost every person enters suffering protesting, quite humanly: "Why?" The person suffering addresses this question to God as Job did, and also to Christ. Even though one identifies the secondary cause of the handicap, even though one hopes to overcome and manages to do so through (strength of) will and rehabilitation, the subjective problem remains: Why this suffering? Why this restriction at this time in my life? This mystery accompanies us just as it accompanies all human trials, even human work. Christ gives an answer from his cross, from the depth of his own suffering. It is not an abstract answer, it is a call which requires time for us to hear.

Christ gave universal redemptive value to his own suffering which appeared to be imposed on him from without. He accepted it out of obedience towards his Father and out of love for humanity in order to free it from its sin, the ultimate cause of suffering and death. And if we agree to do so, we also can participate in this redemption. This agreement is neither fatality nor resignation to suffering, which remains as evil against which we must continue to struggle. But God shows us how to draw good from evil by offering up our suffering with the cross of Christ. I'm sure that many of you are having or have had this experience in faith. The pain remains. But the heart is serene and peaceful. It overcomes the feeling of the uselessness of suffering. It opens itself to love and helps those around to go out of themselves, to give (of) themselves. Such a heart bears witness to faith and hope. It believes that in the mystery of the communion of saints it has something to offer for the salvation of its brothers and sisters throughout the world. It enters into the redemptive mission of Christ.

For this moving witness we thank the disabled and all those who discreetly accompany them on their spiritual journey. It is important that the handicapped persons and the sick help one another in associations, not only to make their living conditions more human and to have their rights recognized, but also to share better in this mystery. ... Blessed are those who understand the language of the beatitudes! Human suffering becomes for them a force that can help to transform the world. □

Excerpts from L'Osservatore Romano *English Edition, September 17 & 24, 1984.*

Creating relationships through

On June 3, 1984, 3,500 delegates of the New Humanity Movement who are active in the fields of economy and work met to examine what the Christian contribution can be in these fields today. The talks that day were widely varied in content and in the most recent issues of Living City we have offered our readers coverage of that day beginning with the talk given by Chiara Lubich, founder of the Focolare Movement. Her talk, in fact, laid the foundations for the clear and radical change of mentality which comes about when the Gospel is put into practice.

Other talks (also published in Living City) dwelt on such themes as "Economy and Work: their roots in the Bible" and "The Church and Work." With this issue we will begin the publication of a number of experiences shared by the delegates on that day. They were presented as a contribution to the "civilization of love," and gave efficient confirmation of the fact that by living the Gospel message, it is possible to act, not only on the spiritual level, but on the level of concrete, everyday situations as well. They are examples of efforts made to create relationships through concrete service.

Azaleas were just the beginning

For some people flower cultivation is a pleasurable hobby, but for others it is their life's work, a demanding, difficult and risk-filled occupation, as it is for Serina and Diego Mansutti of Udine, Italy. But it has also given them the opportunity to give work to young handicapped adults and activate a "communion of goods" with others in their profession.

Diego: At the present time my wife and I, together with 2 of our nephews, own a small garden center where we cultivate azalea plants. We started out in this activity fifteen years ago and over the years our business has had its "ups and downs."

At a certain point we were invited to a gathering of the Focolare Movement and we discovered in its spirituality something we had always been looking for. We went home that evening with the certainty in our hearts that God is love and that every event in our lives would be an expression of his love for us.

Difficulties, as in every field of work, were inevitable of course. Once, by mistake, a company supplied us with an exsiccant instead of a fungicide. Within a few days our entire crop was destroyed and we had to start again from scratch.

We decided then to specialize in one kind of plant and worked together with one of my nephews who had studied the cultivation of azaleas in America. We imported a number of plants but they adapted poorly. We were hardly experts. An insect for which there was no known insecticide destroyed half the plants.
In all these hardships, however,

concrete service

by Mariele and Pino Quartana

RIGHT: Serina and Diego Mansutti from Udine, Italy, are the largest producers of azaleas in Italy. Through their help other families have discovered a means of livelihood in this occupation. ABOVE: At work in one of the greenhouses.

we experienced the love of God. We felt that he was near to us and we often felt his love reach us concretely through the helping hands of the people around us. Once, for example, when a hail storm destroyed over 6000 square feet of greenhouse windows many people stepped forward to offer financial help. It was heart warming to see a constant coming-and-going of people from whom we would never have expected so much help. Many other cultivators even sent their own employees to help us remove the pieces of broken glass.

Serina: One day a very close friend asked us if we would consider taking on his sister who suffered from a serious psychic disorder. We welcomed her with all our hearts, ready ►

and willing to overcome the problems we knew would inevitably arise. For example we had to pick her up and drop her off each day at the bus stop which was four miles away. It could have seemed an absurd waste of time since besides everything else a person in her condition could not possibly be productive. We felt however that our Father and hers was asking us to continue.

As time passed we noticed that she was making progress, not so much on the level of production, but psychologically. In a rather short period of time she went from a state of extreme agitation to one of relative calm. She even stopped taking tranquilizers, a habit she had been into for a number of years.

The social worker who followed her case spoke to us about the possibility of taking on three more young people like her. We agreed. They are now at the point of being able to offer valid help and never once have they caused us problems. On the contrary, as time passed we could see them responding positively. They have taught us how to live with simplicity and have enriched our lives in many ways.

At the present time we are practically the only people cultivating azaleas in Italy and there is much room for expansion in this field of work.

Diego: At horticulture conventions which I always attend they often talk about making room for young people and expanding the industry. I have taken the opportunity on occasion to share the fruits of the experiences we have lived. One thing, however, that people are generally very reluctant to speak about are their "professional secrets," and this is for fear of competition. One day, while talking with Serina, we realized that because of a lack of work, many people around us were suffering grave economic hardships. We were reminded of Jesus' words: "Love one another as I have loved you," and we saw that we could teach others the system of growing azaleas that we ourselves had learned through a long and difficult process of trial and error.

Because of this, seven or eight families were able to build greenhouses and work along with us. We sell them the initial plants, watching over them until they flower, providing the appropriate fertilizers and offering technical assistance. Then we help them organize the sale of their plants. With these new cultivators we have a very beautiful relationship of mutual esteem and trust.

A "cooperative" solution

Working towards a new humanity is everyone's task. In Spain, Father Enrique Barriendos, pastor in a small town, set to work to resolve what seemed to be an insurmountable problem.

Fr. Enrique Barriendos

My experience began and is taking place even now in Estremadura, a region in southern Spain, in a small town of 1,400 inhabitants called Calera de Leon. As in many towns in this southern region the most outstanding problems are unemployment and the consequent emigration (most often of young people) to the bigger cities.

When I arrived there I was a young priest, just out of the seminary, eager to "do something"; but it wasn't easy to understand where to begin. One thing I knew for certain, I couldn't just complain that things were going badly and then do nothing. I had to find the answer to the problems I found there. I began by "making myself one" with the people there, with their mentality, with their problems, asking the Holy Spirit to guide me.

One Sunday, three years ago, a parishioner approached me after Mass. He explained to me his idea of forming a cooperative to make bricks and he was asking me for my collaboration. When he had gone I said to myself that perhaps this was the answer to my prayers. The work began: meetings, trips, studies into how to proceed, requests for financial aid from public and private funds. The result was the founding of the Saint Mark Cooperative which now provides

work for fifteen employees with a daily production of 35,000 bricks of top quality. We united our humble efforts to the Providence of God to realize this dream.

Little by little, as we penetrated the world of cooperatives and got to know it better we began to see the enormous wealth of possibilities that lay within it. It was a way of working that not only coincided with the ideal of unity I was trying to live in my own life, but it proved to be the best way to then put this ideal into practice in our situation. It also seemed to me to be the most adapt Christian answer to the situation of unemployment I saw around me. The experience of working in a cooperative was still rather new in Spain; it was a way that was open to many. I often repeated to the shareholders in the cooperative: "If you keep going ahead like this, many will follow you." In fact this proved to be true.

A year and a half later another important experience took place. I had begun a choir in the parish made up of the young girls who were in their last year of high school. Besides their activities with the choir, these girls had begun to meet once a week to share their experiences in trying to put the Gospel into practice. The group was growing and maturing. One day one of the girls (she was no more than fourteen years old) came to tell me that she was going to have to leave everything because she was going to look for work in the city.

I asked myself, "But what will happen to her? What will become of all the spiritual growth that has taken place within her?" Worse than anything, however, was the realization that the other girls in the group were in exactly the same situation. They had no other choice. Or did they?

Young people at work in the Saint Mark Cooperative which produces 35,000 bricks of top quality daily.

The idea came out of creating a small sewing cooperative. Once again I set out: meetings, trips, fund-raising campaigns. In a few months the cooperative dedicated to Our Lady was on its feet. There were twenty-five girls working at it, full of enthusiasm and hope. Today the little industry provides work for thirty-two young people who will not have to leave their home and family to find work elsewhere.

Because of my duties as a priest I was not able to follow every step in the creation of this little cooperative but I was able to attend the inauguration ceremony. It was a joyful event for the whole town.

We turned our attention then to the young men who were also suffering due to the problems of unemployment. The area around the town was rich in forests and the idea began to form of creating a cooperative to produce charcoal to sell throughout Europe. Plans have been drawn up and the project is already underway. There will be full-time work for at least twenty people and many more will be hired during the pruning season. The government funds needed to begin the project have already arrived and within a few months the cooperative will be opening its doors.

Besides its being a valid Christian answer to a serious social situation, this experience of working together has been a useful tool to help the people of the town to learn how to interact, to listen to one another, to respect the values and opinions of each person, and work with greater precision and commitment.

As for myself, through this experience I have understood how important it is for me as a priest to offer my service knowing how to withdraw when I can see that the people can make it on their own so that the person who comes to light is truly Jesus in the midst of the community. □

In the light of the present moment

The life of Rosa Pagan

D.D. Sahdev

Why write about Rosa Pagan? A logical question. Outwardly at least, this woman's life was marked by neither dramatic events nor great heroics. Rosa's days were filled with ordinary pursuits: raising a family, continuing an education, working to make ends meet in a difficult economic situation... Even her slow and painful death at the age of 51 is hardly a thing unheard-of in our times. Yes, in many ways Rosa was an average individual confronting the daily demands and unavoidable pressures of 20th century existence.

However, the many interviews conducted with her friends and family over the past year, and the testimony she herself left in the form of diaries, letters and poems, shed light on another side of her—one which gives even the most routine aspects of her life a deep significance. In the last years of her life, it seems, Rosa did all the ordinary things in an extraordinary way.

"Small things," she wrote in December 1971, "no matter how small they may be, can have a powerful impact, so long as they are imprinted with love, or with suffering transformed into love."

Rosa lived like this. The motivation and inspiration behind her actions, and the powerful "substance" of her life, are best revealed through her own words.

Many worked at compiling this biography which we will begin to publish with this issue of Living City. We are offering it because we feel it is very valuable from both a human and spiritual point of view.

"O humid mornings of my Puerto Rican land"

Rosa Pagan was born in 1921 in Puerto Rico. Of her early years she has written: "My childhood was simple, with the simplicity of those who possess nothing and, yet, to whom nothing is lacking, because divine Providence provides for them."

Her earliest memories contain many references to the maternal love which enveloped her throughout her childhood. "My family, gathered at my mother's side," she wrote, "became the loving nest and point of departure of my journey through life. I did not know my father, and so my grandfather took his place, he and my grandmother whom I used to call 'Mama'. And my dear mother ... I will never forget how much she gave me through her silence...."

Rosa's grandfather worked in a sawmill, and her mother took in laundering to help support the six children. "Mother," Rosa wrote, recalling those times, "I see the creek and the big stones surrounding it. In the water ... your reflection.... It is you! And then the sad reality: I see you bending over a stone. Your hands, the hands of an artist, are doing hard work—washing clothes. You spent days, weeks, months and years in this way, always trying to earn bread for your children. I couldn't understand your suffering then, the continuous effort you put forth, giving everything for us. Nor was I able to return your love."

The years went by, and Rosa entered adolescence, a period she describes with mixed emotions: "If I try to remember the years of my youth, it is only in order to smile with sorrow for what I was, and for what I did with those years that we call the 'springtime' of our life."

Like every young person Rosa had many dreams. In this poem she speaks with the voice of her youth.

FANTASY
Gentle breeze,
playful and vain,
coming from far away...
What are you bringing me?
Mischievous breeze!
You laugh...
I beg of you,
let me dream
my dreams

My dreams are like balms of light,
like the flight of butterflies,
like the sun's rays at dawn...
Coloring
my morning hours
with hues of pink.

"Yes," Rosa wrote, "my youthful years could be called the 'springtime' of my life, too, if we look at them with the eyes of the world—as my eyes were then, as I myself was then. I was completely taken with the world. Dances, parties, friends, fun... 'But, in reality, where is happiness?' I asked myself. 'Where is the realization of our dreams?' "

As the thirties drew to a close, Rosa was still seeking the answer to those questions. She was now 18 years old.

"How was I? Who was I? A good girl, basically. But what a confusion of things! I was a ►

bee that flew from flower to flower sucking the nectar, or a restless butterfly blinded by the sun. But a day would come in which I would fall blinded by another light.

"Outside of myself I searched for something which I wanted, but did not know how to define. I wanted to give meaning to my life and did not find any. I looked for happiness in the things of the world but found only delusions and sufferings. And yet I didn't give up. I continued to search and to find new delusions. I was not made for the things of the world.

"Mystery, the unknown, the heavens, silence, fascinated me. And so there were awakened within me the expectations and the contradictions that later would grow larger, a spirit which desired the light and walked in the dark, a soul which longed for heaven but remained rooted to the earth, a heart thirsty for pure water that drank the muddy waters of the world."

Even as a young woman, Rosa "longed for heaven." she held fast to her dreams, but by now they were tempered with the bittersweet flavor of experience. She had come a long way, "along verdant paths and thorny trails; through calm days and stormy weather; light and darkness; failures and new beginnings..."

Much later she would write of these times:

"O humid mornings of my Puerto Rican land, mornings filled with dew and kissed by the sun! How many times my little bare feet trampled paths of green illusions, bordered by jasmines which in green and white lines guarded my steps.

"And you, jasmines, sentinels of my childhood mornings, how many times you repelled me with the bitterness of your heart.

My thoughts wandered in faraway lands of illusions and suddenly you interfered with my daydreams. You seemed to say: 'Stop, admire my beauty, my white soul and my green mantle.'

"I stopped... I drank of the perfume of your white flowers. Your green eyes, moist and full of life, enchanted my child's heart. I let myself be tempted by your berries and I gathered them.... Oh, what a delusion! Their juice was bitter and repugnant.

"How many times along the paths of life the illusions have confused and tricked me. I pursued dreams and found delusions; I sought sweetness and found bitterness. Oh jasmines of my childhood, sentinels of paths wet with dew, beauty of mornings of my land, how much truth you contain in your severity! My friend, from green bile and from white perfume, let me cry there, next to you, on the path of my childhood innocence.

"Life, when I see you with the eyes of my heart you are as bitter as the jasmine berries.

"Life, when I see you with the eyes of my soul you are white and perfumed, and your paths, narrow or wide, are permeated with dew; dew that gives life, refreshes, fortifies; dew that sweetens the bitterness of illusions. And I walk, thirsty for eternity."

It was this thirst for eternity which opened Rosa's eyes, allowing her to see God for what he really is—infinite love, a love which had been waiting for her all along.

"My walk was a long one; it was my own fault. His plan for me must have been beautiful from the beginning. It was I who ruined everything. He didn't change, and continued to create roads for my return, one after the other, and I made of all of them a labyrinth. But the weaker we are, the greater is his mercy; the more I fell, the greater his love was revealed."

His love was so great that Rosa felt drawn to answer it. God was asking something of her, but she knew not what it was: "Tired but calm, I searched in the silence of my soul, in the depth of my being. At first I found only darkness and pain, but then, there in the very depths, amidst darkness and disillusionment, I found a ray of hope. And I let its light guide me.

"It was February—a February green and flowering in that corner of Puerto Rico that had seen me born and had seen me grow. I was 22 years old.

"My way, my refuge: Jesus.

"I remember Father M. In him, Christ was standing before me and in him I emptied all the heaviness I had in my soul.

"A new era of my life began. New projects, new vigor, new and different illusions."

FLUTTERING WINGS
Silence
all around me.
In my soul,
flutterings wings.
Silence.

Heavenly wings.
Fragrance of eternity.
My heart rests...
and new desires
blossom
in the dawn of light.

"Everything seemed a dream and yet it was real. I didn't imagine that one day I could lose that happiness that I had found.

"And yet...."

Rosa Pagan

Rosa married, but it was not a happy marriage. In 1948 she gave birth to her first child, a son, Jose. "I still remember this birth," she wrote in 1971. "I felt that Mary was close by me, as if she had turned her face toward mine at that painful moment. I promised her that if it were a girl I would name her Mary; and if it were a boy I would call him Jose."

Six years later another boy, Hector, was born, and in 1959, her youngest son, Eddie, came into the world. Rosa loved her children deeply, as only a mother can, and she wanted them to enjoy full and happy lives. However things were not going well for her small family.

The year was 1960.

"I lived in a corner of Puerto Rico in the midst of green hills which surrounded a lake. My house was everything but a house—a fabric store, a restaurant, a ballroom, things my husband loved and I detested. It was New Year's Eve. Everyone talked, laughed, toasted. Midnight! There was a moment of silence, then embraces, kisses, peals of laughter, glasses lifted for a toast. My husband was in the middle of everything. I took advantage of the confusion of that moment to flee to my room. I grasped my rosary beads and knelt down. I spoke to Mary. "Mama," I said, "I will say the rosary everyday, but I ask you, take me away from here. I can't take it anymore. If I could at least offer my tears to God, but I am not able to. I know that I'm worth nothing, but I ask you, listen to me and take me away!'

"A year passed and nothing changed in my life.

"New Year's returned and again I implored my Mother: 'Mama, when will you take me away from this place?'

"Another year began, and still nothing. But Mary had not forgotten me. She was always my intercessor and one day she answered my petition of those two New Year's nights. When I least expected it, my moment to leave arrived. Unexpected circumstances left me alone, with three boys to bring up."

A PILGRIM

Lord,
let me drink at your fountain.
Satisfy my thirst.
I am a pilgrim
tired of wandering;
let me rest
while leaning against your trees.
Let me lose myself in you.

Recreated
in this bath of light
let me be like a flower
along your footpath.
A flower pure and white,
emanating a fragrance
which is love.

To be continued.

WORD OF LIFE

"But God loved us with so much love that he was generous with his mercy: when we were dead through our sins, he brought us to life with Christ."
(Eph. 2:4-5)

The word makes us live.

The word makes us free.

The word guarantees happiness.

The word converts.

The word purifies us.

The word draws us to our specific vocations.

The word brings forth the hatred of the world and the sanctity of the disciple.

The word makes us see the truth.

The word brings comfort.

The word gives us joy.

The word produces works.

The word gives wisdom.

The word preserves us from human concerns.

The word obtains everything.

The word brings about union with God.

The word gives us hope of eternal life.

The word makes us one.

The word changes one's mentality.

The word makes each soul a heaven.

"But God loved us with so much love that he was generous with his mercy: when we were dead through our sins, he brought us to life with Christ"

This sentence is part of a letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christian communities whose members came in part from a pagan background, and some from Judaism. He wanted them to experience first hand the immense love of God for us, and he found no better way to do this than to compare what we were once were, and would have remained if Christ had not come, and what we are now because of his merits.

We were slaves to sin, tossed about by the wind of errors and passions, far from God, even "rebellious." Now, instead, we possess the fullness of true life in Christ.

Who worked this incredible transformation? It was through the love of the Father who, out of pure mercy, brought us from death to life, from the slavery of sin to the freedom of the children of God; through Baptism we became "one" with his Son.

"But God loved us with so much love that he was generous with his mercy: when we were dead through our sins, he brought us to life with Christ."

The first characteristic of the love of God which comes to light in this passage is that it is free. God takes the initiative for our rehabilitation, independently of our personal merit. If he reaches out to us it is because of his love which is completely free and without ulterior motives. "Truly, there was nothing in us that could have attracted God's love. But this is precisely the love of God. I does not need to be aroused, like human love, by the attractiveness of the object. The love of God creates the lovableness of its object. Man is not loved by God because he is lovable, but he becomes lovable by the fact that God loves him."[1]

The love of God is creative love. Since he was the first to love us we become new beings. He modelled us after Christ creating within us the same beauty, and making us as "lovable" as his Son.

"But God loved us with so much love that he was generous with his mercy: when we were dead through our sins, he brought us to life with Christ."

The other characteristic of the love of God that we discover here is that it is without limits. God does not limit himself to forgiving us the sins we have committed. He wants to offer us the greatest good that a person could ever imagine: his own life, his own joy, participation, through Jesus, in his same glory.

Often Christians have a very limited concept of what Jesus obtained for us through the redemption.

They stop at certain effects, that is, at the forgiveness of sins and freedom from eternal punishment. They forget the more fascinating, positive effect—the gift that God wants to give us of himself, of his love, of his grace which make us become another Jesus.

What could be greater that being joined forever to the destiny of his Son?

This is what St. Paul means when he affirms that God "brought us to life with Christ."

"But God loved us with so much love that he was generous with his mercy: when we were dead through our sins, he brought us to life with Christ."

This word of life requires of us a great faith in the transforming and creative power of the love that Jesus brought on earth, and in order to live this word of life we must look at him. During his life on earth, Jesus showed us what it is to love continually and unselfishly, to be always the first to love, to love all without distinction, preferring the "least", the outcasts, the sinners. His love was boundless, he loved without paying attention to the limits or narrow-mindedness of his listeners, or even his own apostles. His love went beyond all misunderstandings, ingratitude, resistance or the obstacles that his words might have encountered throughout history. He believed in the irresistible power of that love which he went about sowing in the small villages of Palestine and in the heart of his disciples.

He was certain that his ideal, his most fervent desire — "That all may be one, as you Father are in me and I in you" (Jn. 17:21) — would come about in spite of all the separative forces present in humanity and the sins of division that would have wounded his Church.

We, too, must act this way, convinced that we must be the first to love and take the initiative in every situation. Maybe we have the impression that with a certain person, a colleague at work for example who has a difficult temperament, there's no hope.

In the family, group or community to which we belong are there perhaps absurd situations which lead us to close in on ourselves? Would we like to run away from them? Are we dejected and discouraged because of the evils, the injustices, the corruption, the scandals we see around us, and the apparent lack of sincerity in many who call themselves Christians? Are we aware of and suffering because of the drama of division which exists even now among Christian Churches?

It is precisely in these moments that we should remember this word of life: to love all, to be the first to love and, to be rich in mercy because God is merciful.

Chiara Lubich

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1) M. Zerwick, **The Epistle to the Ephesians**, *Ferder and Ferder, New York, 1969 p. 52.*

EXPERIENCES

The following are experiences in living the Gospel which some of our readers have shared with us.

GETTING INTO THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT

I had just been reading the word of life, "If you are repentant, produce the appropriate fruit" (Mt. 3:8) and the words really penetrated my soul. I was determined to put it into practice, but when I got home that afternoon the situation in which I found my family made me begin to falter.

Two of my brothers were fighting and my mother was very upset. The family was involved in putting up the Christmas tree. One wanted the tree to be shorter, one wanted it left tall. One wanted to put tinsel on the tree, the other icicles. At this point I was getting a little upset myself.

I left the room to be alone for a minute. "If you are repentant, produce the appropriate fruit." The first thing I had to do was to change my attitude, to make myself one with each person and love them.

My mother was the one who was the most upset so I went to her first. I remembered that she really wanted me to listen to some tapes of a particular speaker she was really fond of, so I asked her if I could hear her tapes. She was surprised, "Do you really want to hear them?" I assured her I really did and immediately she went to get the tapes. I went straight to my room to play them. Within a few minutes she came to straighten up some things in the room next to mine and I saw her glance across to see if I was really listening. When she saw that I was, she was visibly happy.

Afterwards we started discussing the tree again, but this time we quickly came to a decision about the size and decorations we would use.

There wouldn't be tinsel but there was harmony in our house.

S.G.

MAKING PEACE

One Sunday we decided to attend the noon Mass at a church downtown. We took our three boys with us; they are eleven, nine, and two and a half years old. At Mass, ours were the only children present.

Matthew, the two and a half year old, was being good, but he was making some noises from time to time. Just as the Gospel started, a lady from a few rows behind us suddenly came up and asked us to keep the baby quiet because she had missed the first reading because of him. My husband immediately took the baby to the back of the church.

The word of life we were living was, "The whole of the Law is summarized in a single command: *Love your neighbor as yourself* "(Gal. 45:14). I felt a little stung by the lady's words and actions but I told myself that I must love this neighbor as myself.

At that point, I realized that I wasn't experiencing embarassment or turning red or even feeling resentment. I was surprised at myself. I found I could even smile. The priest read the Gospel and gave a homily. He had seen what had happened and even mentioned in his homily that we must love one another.

I felt I had to live these words well and make peace with this lady.

I turned around to tell her I was sorry, but she didn't look up. I asked Jesus to give her peace. At the sign of peace I turned to her again but she was absorbed in prayer. I told Jesus, "If I can't make peace with her, do it for me. Give her peace."

When Mass was over I started down the aisle with my other two boys when she stopped one of them. She handed him a rosary and said with a smile, "Give this to your little brother. Tell him it's from the grouchy old lady in church and to say his first rosary for her."

J.Z.

When you roll up your sleeves

His voice sounded desperate: "Please come over and let's talk about it," he said.
I couldn't quite understand why he called me. What do I know about selling homes? But I immediately thought that I could do one thing—listen to him out of love; even if I would probably not be able to give any real concrete advice. At least I could still love by listening and be empty in order to listen to his problems.

So I went to see him. He proceeded to tell me that a tough time he was having selling a friend's home. "It's been six months and there are no prospects. Not even an offer presently," he continued. I knew how much my friend needed to sell the house. He then explained to me how the house was in a mess and how this had been turning people off. When I heard this entire story I then immediately shared it with my friends with whom I share this life of unity. Together we decided the first thing to do would be to go and clean the house and see just how badly it needed a revamping. We decided to go on a Saturday morning.

My first reaction when I woke up was, "Why should I give up my weekend cleaning someone else's house? I work so hard all week and I need a rest on my weekends." Then I immediately thought this was again a concrete way to love. It's one thing to say we want to love and its another to love with *actions*.

We finally cleaned up the house after about two hours, and everything looked just fine. The next day to my amazement I received a phone call from my friend. This time his voice was as if coming from another person. "Guess what? I think we sold the house!" A young couple came the very next day after we cleaned and was so amazed at the change (they had already seen the house several months ago) that they want to buy it. At these words I immediately thought to myself: "It was such a small act of love on our part, but it certainly made a difference in another's life."

G.G.

Images FOR words

O Lord,
you have given
everything
its place
in the world,
and no one
can make it
otherwise.

Esther 13:9

Claude Desmarais

Everyday circumstances extraordinary results

Pat Markey

I am a university student and this past semester I took an Architecture design class along with my usual schedule of classes. The first day of class already gave me a good idea how this particular class would be. After I saw the syllabus of work to be done and the list of necessary materials I thought seriously about dropping such an outrageous class. In fact, after that first day, half of the students dropped it. I decided to stay since at that time I was still trying to choose my field of study and I thought this course would be a good introduction to Architecture.

As the semester went along the teacher expected more and more from us to the point that I felt I was working day and night only for this class. The heavy workload made many of the students very resentful and, at times, discouraged. Our teacher was not a very popular person and the students avoided her as much as possible.

Towards the end of the semester all the students were both frustrated and tired and many stopped coming to classes altogether except on days when they had to hand in an assignment. The final blow came when we were assigned a major project; a project that required more materials, work and time than any of the previous ones. We were told that on a certain day we were all to bring all our work to class so that she could see the progress we were making. Many of the students decided that they would just skip that class and do their work at home. When the day arrived I was also strongly tempted to do the same but I thought of our teacher. Certainly she must have been aware of all the bad feelings in the class and the resentment towards her. It had reached the point that many students were not even bothering to come to class. I decided that out of love for her I would take everything and go to the class even if no one else bothered to come.

In fact that day in class we were only three. When the teacher arrived she looked around but said nothing. She came over to me and asked to see my work. As I showed her my project she began to verbally tear it apart and when she had commented on everything I had done she started to criticize me saying that I should never have even been in the class because she had no time to waste teaching such basic things and this went on for at least half an hour. When she finished I felt so bad that I took a break and left the room.

I walked around the campus trying to figure out what had happened. I had gone to the class out of love for her and look what had happened. It just didn't make sense. Then I remembered Jesus on the cross when he felt forsaken by his Father; even in that moment he had continued to love. I realized then that I had to go back to the class and try to love my teacher even in this absurd situation.

When I got there, I went to her and asked what suggestions she might have for my project. We went over the project from start to finish, making all the plans for its completion and afterwards she seemed to be very happy.

After this experience I tried even harder to do all my work out of love for her. During the last week of school I saw her walking towards the classroom alone. I said hello and started to walk beside her. For the first time she began to talk to me telling me about her husband and her family and many other things. From that moment a new relationship was established between us that went beyond that of teacher-student. I felt she thought of me as a friend.

Besides going to school I also have been working part time for the past two years for a printing company. In the time that I have been there I have worked in just about every area of the company, from driving the delivery truck to doing the bookkeeping, and I have a pretty good idea about the way things work and what needs to be done.

One day we had a couple of big printing jobs and I worked most of the day folding one of the orders while another man was working at trimming and packaging the other job. In the afternoon he left for some reason and I went ahead with the job I had been doing. As soon as I finished I went to the front office and saw my boss. He asked me how the other job was going and I told him that right now no one was working at it. He didn't seem to be too happy about that and I could see that he was really under a lot of pressure to finish that particular job. I went back to

FROM THE TEACHER'S DESK

Meeting everyone's needs

In the school where I work the librarian has had her hours cut to one half the time that she previously worked. As a consequence she began to schedule all of the classes in the school to come to the library at a time that was convenient for her.

The teachers became very angry and began to complain that the students' needs were not being met. They were right, but their approach to the matter brought about an atmosphere of friction and tore away at the small bit of unity that had been built in the school. Teachers were starting to involve parents, and the librarian was refusing to make any concessions. How could I bring about unity in this situation?

One day the librarian stopped me in the hall. She needed someone to listen to her problems so I listened, giving her all my attention, ready to take on this problem and try to solve it as if it were my own. I told her that I understood what a difficult task she had. When she asked me what I thought of her schedule I told her that perhaps more needs could be met with a different one. That was all I said. Within a two-hour period she came to my room four times with different schedules. The last one met the needs of every student in the school.

That afternoon I had the opportunity to speak to some of the teachers who had been most upset over the situation. They seemed to think, "He's willing to make peace with the librarian, but we're not." I tried to point out the very difficult task she had because the hours at her disposal were really not enough. They seemed to understand. Just as I was leaving for home I saw them standing around in a small group talking and laughing. The librarian was with them.

T.R.

work on another order that had come in and soon my boss walked by asking how the other job was going. When he saw that still no one was working on it he turned and started yelling at me, why wasn't I doing my job! He told me to immediately get to work on the other job and he stormed off.

At first I was shocked. In the two years that I had been there he had never criticized me for my work and he had never raised his voice at me. I became furious myself, indignant that he would have said such things to me. I was about to go after him into his office and start yelling when I remembered that also Jesus on the cross had suffered a terrible injustice and that what I felt was just a small fraction of his tremendous suffering. In trying to unite my suffering to his I felt a great peace, and I knew then that the only solution was to love even in this circumstance. I decided that I would finish the entire job out of love for my boss especially since I knew that it was the pressure to get it finished that was making him so tense and nervous.

After that decision the job I was doing was not really work, it was a joy. I finished in no time, and when I later saw my boss I told him not to worry, that it was all taken care of. When I said that his face lit up. "Really?" he said. "Thanks, I knew I could count on you."

After I had been working for this printing company for a while they hired a young girl who had just graduated from high school. She spoke very little and hardly ever smiled.

One day we had a big book that needed to be put together and stapled so I was working that day in the bindery. There was a lot of work to do so the boss asked Janet to help me. It was not a very exciting job—it consisted of walking back and forth picking the pages up off the table and putting them together.

After we had been working for a while in silence we started to talk a little. I asked her about her family and she slowly started to tell me an almost unbelievable story. When she was only eight, her older brother had been killed and her life had consisted of a number of serious tragedies involving other family members.

The more she talked, the more I realized the pain and sufferings she had gone through. I knew it was not my place to try and give her answers, but since she felt confident enough to share all these things with me, I could take these sufferings upon myself and bear them as if they were mine.

Before leaving that day she told me how happy she was to know someone who could really understand her sufferings. □

Gregory of the Trinity

In this rapid journey through the first centuries of the history of the Church, it is time to turn our spotlight on the person whom many have called 'Beauty's Philosopher': a bishop who did not count himself as such, and yet who fulfilled his ministry in some of Constantinople's most dramatic moments.

by SILVANO COLA

Today I have come here to Arianzo, a rural town near Nazianzus, in Cappadocia, to visit Bishop Gregory which is actually known by the name of Nazianzuz, a man who, from what I have been told, firmly repudiates his deserving the title of bishop, though he is the only person to do so. Over the years he has been Bishop of Sasima and even Bishop of Constantinople. He remained there for two very important years, during and following the Council of Constantinople of 381. Then he returned to his hermitage in Arianzo where he lives in a converted stable furnished with a small desk and ink and ... he writes.

I think he must be approaching sixty, but there is an almost childlike innocence about him, and an almost adolescent wonderment in the face of the mystery of the absolute beauty of the universe. God is more real for him than anything visible around him, and more beautiful than any beauty. I remember hearing him say a few years ago, "We must keep within ourselves the reflection of God in all its purity so that it will be like a mirror that reflects, with absolute fidelity, the light of God, that one true light whose rays alone can penetrate this world's gloom."

When I entered I found him at his desk, a searing cough tore at his lungs, yet he looked up at me with luminous eyes.

"Can you spare me a few minutes" I asked. "I would like to learn something about you and about your life. You see, you rather give the impression of having lived a continual contradiction."

He looked at me and smiled. "As a matter of fact, I was just writing my will. I feel that I have very little time left for living; and I want everything that I possess to remain in the Church of Nazianzus."

"Are you frightened of dying?" I asked.

"Frightened? Absolutely not! On the contrary, I have often asked myself where I shall end up after all my troubles. I have even said to Jesus, 'Tell me, Word of God.' But he didn't answer me. However, he made me understand! Since then, the only prayer that I have used has been this: 'Call me to your home, to that eternal dwelling place where my Trinity dwells, where that One is shining, the One whom I have discovered and loved even in his fragile shadows that are scattered throughout his creation'."

"Will you tell me something of your life, and of those troubles you mention ... or rather how you lived through them?"

For a moment Gregory paused with his eyes closed in deep recollection. "Do you know how someone feels," he began, "when all his life he has wanted to follow a certain road but is instead constantly being sent in the opposite direction? Sometimes I even grumbled, you know. I wished people would have left me alone. Take Basil for example. When we got to know one another in Athens —doing our advanced studies— we were like two drops of water in love with beauty. Then he changed completely. He became a man of action, the builder, the terrifying adversary of heretics, a strategist! I admired him, but why did he have to involve me any further? Why couldn't he just let me go my own way as he had done?"

"But did you know which was your way?" I blurted out, ►

Gregory of Nazianzus (beside the hooded figure, with next to him John Chrysostom and Basil the Great). His homilies and writings on the Trinity earned him the title of theologian. The beauty, in fact, of the Trinity absorbed him to the point of forgetting his sufferings and apparent lack of success.

A coin stamped with the image of the Emperor Theodosius who defended Gregory against the Arians and acclaimed him as Bishop of Constantinople.

slightly annoyed at his implied criticism of the great Bishop. Gregory only laughed and that provoked his cough unfortunately.

"Don't get annoyed," he responded paternally. "I have nothing against anyone, especially Basil. I'm only explaining to you what I have felt at various time. But, what was my 'way,' you ask. Let me try to explain.

Do you remember my mother, Nonna? She was a real Christian. She had married a pagan. He was intelligent and pleasant and, of course, she converted him right away to Christianity. So successfully that he was already the Bishop of Nazianzus before I was even born!

"When I was about ten years old I had a dream. In it there appeared two figures, very beautiful ones, who introduced themselves as Chastity and Temperance. They invited me to go with them to heaven towards the splendor of the eternal Trinity. Maybe it was just a childish fantasy, but the memory of it really inspired me ... to live one's whole life in search of perfect beauty, as beauty's philosopher, it was too good to be true.

"After a period with Basil spent in genuine contemplation —it was then that we wrote together the Rule for monks, and studied the theology of Origen—the Christians of the same Nazianzus talked me into becoming a priest. It was useless to try and refuse, partly because of the strength of their persistence, and partly because by nature I was quite shy. On Christmas night, in 361, I was ordained a priest.

"Then Basil took a hand in things again. He 'forced' me to become a bishop. Of course I know he did it out of love for the Church but I just couldn't imagine myself dealing day and night with the rights and wrongs of Sasima, that little village of four farm houses! There were more chickens and pigs than people! I couldn't even set foot in it. Instead I fled and bemoaned my lost freedom in seclusion.

"When my father died they wanted to make me the bishop of Nazianzus but once again I fled and took refuge in the monastery of Saint Thecla. In the year 378 a delegation of Catholics arrived from Constantinople and told me that the city was in the hands of the Arians who had taken over all the churches. 'Please come,' they begged. Once again I allowed myself to be persuaded. We opened a little church in the house of one of the faithful. I gave it the name 'Anastasis,' the House of the Resurrection, hoping that the time of Arian intrigues and violence in the city would come to an end. In a few weeks there were more people coming to us than to all the basilicas in the hands of the Arians put together. In effect, the Church was being resurrected."

"I broke into his narrative, "We all know that you had some pretty violent rows with the Arians," I said. "Your ideas about the Trinity certainly wouldn't suit them!"

"That was it of course! And they did all they could to silence me. For example, one

Sunday they burst into our little Church and began throwing stones. I was only injured but someone was actually killed. Then, just think, they put me on trial saying it was all my fault! As you know the Arians don't believe in the Trinity, and so they cannot possibly love it. Of course there is no violence or tyranny in the Trinity. Whoever believes in the Trinity must love his or her neighbor, must love peace, love everyone without discrimination, without looking down on anyone. One day I said in my sermon that the only difference between one person and another is in the degree of love that they show, and that we must do away with all our old ideas about privileges, prerogatives and the right to command; with rights and wrongs, with superiority and inferiority, with negative comparisons. For example, it is true that on different occasions I have commended virginity because I am convinced that whoever is virgin is free from the confines of the world, and is thus in a position to free the world from its weaknesses. But why does virginity have to be set as the opposite to marriage? does marriage really distance you from God? Didn't Jesus himself preside at a wedding feast. People just don't want to understand that it is not so much the state in which one lives as the *way* in which one lives! Take my sister Gorgonia as an example. She is married, yet I can assure you that her soul is virgin. Whether married or single people are, in themselves, like formless matter. They should allow themselves to be modelled by *the* Artist, the Word, if they wish to attain perfection. How good it would be if, for example, married women were one heart with those who remain single, and both were united in the same offering to God of their lives. Each would beautify the other!" ►

Often, from the pulpit of the cathedral of Santa Sophia, Gregory delivered many of his important and beautiful sermons urging the faithful to love, to love peace, to love all without discrimination.

I sat listening to him wide-eyed. I was so taken up by his words that I did not even notice the silence that had fallen between us. "Excuse me for going on like this," he said. "I get carried away. You see I feel that no one will understand that only by learning to love on this earth following the example of the Trinity will all our problems be solved."

"So what happened in Constantinople?" I asked. The bishop allowed himself one of his rare smiles.

"Well, the new Emperor, Theodosius, was a man with ideas that were directly opposite to those of the Arian Valens. Theodosius proclaimed me as the sole bishop of the city and moved me to the Cathedral of Saint Sophia. Soon after that there was a Council called in Constantinople, that was in 381, but the Eastern and Western bishops couldn't seem to get along. They almost reached the point of insulting one another. The rivalry was so severe that some of the Eastern bishops, to demonstrate their supremacy, shouted: 'But wasn't Christ born in the east?' I couldn't restrain myself and I shouted back, 'Certainly! But he was also put to death in the East!' That's the kind of atmosphere we were living in....

"By that time I was tired and not at all in good health. In a sermon that I gave in Saint Sophia's I made known my desire to retire. The faithful, however, were up in arms, and gathered around my house to protest. I wanted to cry at this sight but still I knew I couldn't stay. Before I left I spoke to the people saying something like this: 'Goodbye my trinity. Goodbye to the one and only care and concern I have ever had, the one and only source of all that is good. In strength may you live the life of the faithful, and in so doing bring them to salvation. Come what may, they are mine!'

"I felt I could say it because they were trying to live the life of the Trinity and, in leaving them, I felt I was abandoning the Trinity itself."

"You have always tried to explain the Trinity," I observed, thinking back to the famous sermons in the Chapel of the Resurrection.

"Yes, I tried. However, as I am sure you are aware, we do not have words or illustrations adequate enough to succeed. To get close to God is only possible when we silence everything within ourselves, accepting the shadows that separate us from him. As for me, I preferred to try and let myself be guided by the Holy Spirit whom I felt to be so close to my heart, and to do nothing but to adore him with the Father and the Son, the One and only Divinity.... You see, sometimes it happens that no sooner do I begin thinking about the unity of God than I feel utterly filled with the splendor of the Trinity. How can I explain it? Try to think of it in this way. The Trinity is pure and unlimited light. Light which flows from three sources, fusing then into a single sea of light. It is 'light' which can also be called 'love.' For this reason it can be said that only through the Holy Spirit does God speak, or through those whom the Holy Spirit has purified. For this reason you can only enter into communion with God through love."

I knew that he had almost driven himself to death in his efforts to defend the divinity of the Holy Trinity, so loudly denied by different sects. In a sermon he preached in 372, he declared, "How much longer can we deprive the souls of the full knowledge of the divinity of the Holy Spirit? It is high time that we ceased talking in metaphors and declared him unequivocally to be God!" And to those who came back at him saying that the great Fathers before him had not even posed the question, he answered, "Would it have been sensible to proclaim openly the divinity of the Son, before the Divinity of the Father had been recognized? For the same reason the divinity of the Holy Spirit could not have been proclaimed when the divinity of the Son had not been recognized. But now the Holy Spirit abides in our midst and offers to all a powerful proof of his existence."

"Tell me, what does the Holy Spirit mean for you personally?"

The smile came without hesitation, a smile of ineffable joy and love illuminating the old man's features. "He is the spirit of God," he replied. "Where there is truth, there is the Spirit. Where there is freedom, there is the Spirit. Where there is holiness, there he is, because it is his nature to sanctify all that he touches. He gave form to the universe. It is he who can perfect man."

Gregory—an old man, true, but so alive. Out of that frail and wasted body the Holy Spirit was bursting forth. □

What is the Focolare Movement?

THE BEGINNINGS

FOCOLARE means "hearth," "family fireside." What first strikes people when they come in contact with members of the Focolare, whether in small groups or in large gatherings, is the atmosphere of a family. It is a family formed by many different people in various walks of life. The Focolare Movement is also known as the "Work of Mary." Under this name it was approved by Pope John XXIII in 1962.

The Focolare Movement began in 1943 in Italy. In the midst of the terrible destruction of World War II, Chiara Lubich realized that God is the only one worth living for. As a result, she began to center her life on the Gospel, together with a small group of young women who followed her. Their ideal became one of striving toward the fulfillment of Jesus' last prayer to the Father: "May they all be one" (Jn.17:21).

The life of Chiara and her first companions, and the spiritual way they spontaneously followed, gave rise to the unique form of spirituality of the Focolare Movement, a spirituality of unity. It has proved to be a powerful means of introducing the Gospel into modern life, of going to God together.

WHO ARE THE FOCOLARINI

Single men and women live in separate communities called Focolare Centers. Their principal aim is to achieve unity among themselves through mutual charity practiced twenty-four hours a day. They follow the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. They work as other laymen and women in regular jobs and professions.

Some married persons, even though continuing to live in their families, participate fully in the life of either the men's or women's Focolare Centers in their common effort to achieve this same unity. They are called "Married Focolarini" and form the backbone of a vast Movement within the Movement, called the New Family Movement.

THE VOLUNTEERS AND THE NEW HUMANITY MOVEMENT

The Volunteers, also called the "Volunteers of God," are a large group within the Focolare Movement; they would like to transform all human realities according to the Gospel spirit. The Volunteers are the backbone of the mass movement called New Humanity. The aim of this Movement is to help form a society made of men and women who are made "new" by the Gospel message and who can then bring new life to all fields of human activity (education, business, etc.). This results in new social relationships which, in turn, lead to the realization of new structures of society.

GEN

The new generations of the Focolare Movement form another Movement or, better, three movements: the Gen 2, the Gen 3 and the Gen 4 Movements, divided according to their various age groups. "Gen" stands for new generation. The Gen have committed themselves to living the Gospel message of love and to sharing with other youth the conviction they have that the Gospel is the answer to every question and the motive for everything they do.

THE MOVEMENT AMONG THE RELIGIOUS

Men and women religious — although they live according to their own rules and constitutions and are already a distinct part of the Church through their religious families — can also be associated with the Focolare.

Contact with the Movement helps them to focus their attention on the specific charism of their founders, and to see how it can be lived in the present time.

PRIESTS — PRIESTS' MOVEMENT —SEMINARIANS — PARISH MOVEMENT

Many diocesan priests are committed to living the spirituality of the Focolare Movement. Some of them live in community. They form the backbone of the Priests' Movement which is made up of priests who live the spirituality of unity.

FOCOLARE FAMILY

The largest group within the Focolare Movement is made up of men, women and young people who are connected with the Movement without having any formal ties with it. Their bond of unity stems from their acceptance of its spirit and their desire to live it.

ECUMENISM

The Movement not only crossed the political boundaries of more than 100 countries, it has also gone beyond the barriers erected for centuries between the various Christian Churches.

Ecumenical activities take place in the different parts of the world where the Movement exists.

In the past few years a promising, ongoing dialogue has been established with faithful of other religions.

SUMMER MARIAPOLIS

Summer meetings are held every year for those interested in the Movement and for those who wish to come into contact with it. For one week persons of all ages and walks of life are exposed to the spirituality of unity. Above all, they strive to practice it by creating among themselves a rapport that molds them into a community. It is intended to be a basic experience of such intense unity that the people will be able to bring it back into their own environments. And this is the most striking fruit of these conventions. They tend to be models of a world which lives according the Gospel.

PERMANENT MARIAPOLIS

The need to prolong the experience of the summer meetings brought about the birth of small cities called Permanent Mariapolis. They are made up of young men and women, as well as whole families, who are there for a designated period of time to be formed according to the Gospel spirit of unity.

They also attend classes in Sacred Scripture, Theology and Sociology and work for their own support.

MARIAPOLIS CENTERS

In addition to the Permanent Mariapolis, there are Mariapolis Centers, which are training centers for the members of the Movement.

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